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JURY FINDS FIVE GUILTY OF SMUGGLING COCAINE

_____TAMPA - A jury in U.S. District Court in Tampa today found five individuals guilty of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine and possession with intent to distribute cocaine. Jesus Portocarrero Cana, Jose Murillo-Kachinbo, Pedro Aguirre Zatisaval, Cristino Mendoza Gomes and Gustavo Gomes Rivas were traveling in a 30-foot "go-fast" boat which was intercepted on June 10, 2001, in the eastern Pacific Ocean. A U.S. Navy vessel was on patrol in the eastern Pacific nearby when a U.S. Coast Guard aircraft spotted the "go fast" boat more than 800 miles west of the coast of Colombia. As bales of cocaine were jettisoned from the boat, the Navy began its pursuit. The boat was stopped and five men were taken into custody. It was estimated that the boat contained more than a ton and a half of cocaine.

Each defendant faces a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years' up to life imprisonment.

This investigation is part of Operation Panama Express which is a joint effort of the United States Coast Guard, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), U.S. Customs Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the U.S. Marshals Service. This case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jeffrey S. Downing of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) in the Middle District of Florida.